

Cambridge Midsummer and Stourbridge Fairs Scrapbook 1897 to 1990

Facts, Features and (occasional) Fallacies
reported in Cambridge Newspapers
summarised by

Mike Petty

Most of these stories originally appeared in the Cambridge Daily/Evening/News or the Cambridgeshire Weekly News. They are supplemented by some articles published in the Cambridge Independent Press or Cambridge Chronicle

I have digital and other copies of most of the stories summarised.

The original volumes are housed in the Cambridgeshire Collection at Cambridge Central Library together with have detailed cuttings files on over 750 topics that have been compiled since the 1960s.

The complete 'Cambridgeshire Scrapbook' of which this is a small section is published online at bit.ly/CambsCollection.

Newspapers sometimes get things wrong. I copy things out incorrectly. Do check. There are a multitude of spelling and layout errors. Please forgive or correct them

News never stops but this file was finished on 31 August 2016.

I will maintain supplements and corrections – contact me for anything you need

Please make what use of these notes that you may. Kindly remember where they came from

See my website – www.mikepetty.org.uk for further notes.

Mike Petty, Stretham

2017

Midsummer Fair and Stourbridge Fair compiled by Mike Petty

1897

"Midsummer probably best known fair in world ... Henry Thurston born 1847 son of Cambridge brickmaker worked in brickyard & 1868 acquired children's street roundabout ... 1887 purchased four-abreast set of gallopers ... painted on the rounding boards scenes from Oxford & Cambridge Boat Race (other details) [6]

1897

Stourbridge Fair lasts for 3 days only & apart from "Ossferdye" deals with nothing but toys, confectionery & amusements [1.23]

1897 06 09

A good number of people are attending the fete on Midsummer Common. In that part of the enclosure nearest Maid's Causeway, shooting galleries, stalls, cocoanut shies and one of Thurston's steam roundabouts were gathered and kept matters lively. During the afternoon a fancy dress bicycle carnival took place, handsome prizes were awarded for the best costumes. The first prize for the ladies, a diamond and ruby crescent brooch, was awarded to Miss L. Unwin of Newnham who, with helmet, breastplate, shield and trident made a dignified Britannia. Miss Unwin will also receive the silver "King of the Road" lamp and baby bell given by the Humber Cycle Supply Co.

1897 09 25

At Cambridge's ancient Stourbridge Fair there is no lack of "local colour". Mongrel dogs lurch around after cross-eyed men and towsey-headed women; a maudlin old tipler recites, stuttering, the composition of one of the great unknowns of long ago, to a bleary-eyed little nosed party, whose only comment is "Ugh", and females of substance offer curious visitors sticks of doubtful looking toffy, wherewith to wage war upon their digestions. There is no lack of that kind of amusement usual to such gatherings. You can shy at cocoa nuts, ring the bell with a rifle shot, mount an electric lighted roundabout or submit to a ha'porth of grey "ice", just according to the state of your finances

1900 06 22

Midsummer four days' fair was opened this morning. Of roundabouts there are plenty and there are two resplendent switchbacks. Half-a-dozen shows include a menagerie and cinematograph exhibition and the remainder of the fair is made up of shooting galleries, coconut shies, toy and sweet meat stalls, cheapjack wares and drinking booths. There are no less than 15 refreshment saloons, some of which serve a double purpose in supplying thirsty ones and providing accommodation for dancers.

1900 06 25

Business transactions at Midsummer Horse Fair were carried out under uncomfortable conditions. Horses of all sizes were put through their paces on the sodden grass. Business however was brisk, cart horses and nags forming the major portion of the stock. Buyers from many part of the country were at the fair and quite an average amount of buying and selling was done.

1900 09 04

Those who now assemble to witness the ancient ceremony of proclaiming Stourbridge Fair can guess to what extent its glory has departed. The fair has dwindled down to almost the level of the village feast. At one time business and pleasure stalls extended from the railway bridge to East Road and down to the rivers edge on Stourbridge common. The custom of proclaiming the different portions of the fair

is still religiously observed – the leather fair, the hop fair, the wood fair and so on, when no such exist or are likely to be revived. The Toll Collector broke down a portion of the fence dividing Newmarket road from what was in years gone by part of the fairground, and hurled the portion of broken fence on to the now cultivated ground thereby signifying the right of the Corporation to that ground for six weeks. This concluded the ceremony and the Mayor and town officers departed.

1901 06 22

Midsummer Fair, the delight of children and the pleasure of not a few adults was formally opened. On reaching an open space councillors in their carriages commenced throwing the coppers. A spirit of mischief seemed to be present in the first carriage for the coins fell thickest in close proximity to the crockery-ware stalls, one or two even finding a resting place amongst plates. The children pushed and hustled with such energy that a few of the articles were damaged, much to the disgust of the proprietor

1902 09 26

All that is now left to the trader at Stourbridge Fair is the horse fair. This survives and flourishes where other branches of trade have declined. Buyers were in fair number and trading was brisk. Cart horses, hackneys and hunters, foals and ponies were offered for sale. One dealer, Mr Titchmarsh of Barrington got rid of about 40 carthorses during the morning. The pleasure fair consists largely of refreshment saloons and stalls from which pungent odours proclaim, even at a distance, the nature of the edibles on sale. Some roundabouts, swing boats and one peep show, in Garlic Row, complete the fair

1904 06 23

The Midsummer Fair brought its usual amusements but the cinematograph held undisputed sway: it is the autocrat which swallows hundreds of ‘tuppences’ and is always ready for more. It was patronised liberally and showed some very excellent representations of national and local life. War pictures form no inconsiderable part of the programme and among the turns of local interest were views of the May Races and the boiler explosion at Linton. In other respects it was much as other times. A good deal of space was occupied by stalls filled with souvenirs of gaudy hue, swing boats, coconut shies, vending machines of more or less domestic utility and a long array of refreshment saloons.

1904 06 24

Now Midsummer Fair is over again it is appropriate to consider how much the carnival costs Cambridge. The switchback, roundabout and show proprietors were taking money as quickly as they could. One machine carried an average of 60 persons and as it travelled for a minute at intervals of half a minute the takings must have averaged £10 an hour, multiplied by five to give the total for one evening. The thirteen coconut shies were in charge of impulsive maidens whose invitation, “Ave a shy, my dear” must have been almost irresistible. There were 20 drinking booths on Horse Fair Day when an immense amount of drink was consumed. Adding it all together it comes to £645 an evening to say nothing of the amount expended during the afternoons

1904 07 02

Sir – why was it necessary to have 20 drinking booths at Midsummer Fair? No reasonable person can contend they were all required. The licences have to be applied for and the magistrates appear to be too faint-hearted to deny one applicant what they grant to another. I am concerned that either through their negligence or the apathy of temperance people the annual pleasure fair should become a drinking debauch. There was practically a whole street of drinking saloons. Apart from their presence being a strong incentive to a serious amount of unnecessary drinking this is unfair to the public houses in the vicinity who would have done an increased trade in a legitimate way for a few days. – Disappointed

1904 10 01

This week the once famous Stourbridge fair has been held and the question arises, how much does the Borough of Cambridge benefit by allowing its ground to be used for trading purposes. Last year £30 10s. was paid in tolls but council expenditure was £18 17s. including wages for the collectors of tolls, carriages in which the Civic Fathers rode to the proclamation and printing bills. Then there is 'new copper'. That is the shining pence our benevolent Borough rules have the privileged of hurling to crowds of children. That cost 18s. But in the case of Reach fair we have actually to pay in hard cash for the privilege of exercising jurisdiction over the village merrymaking and horse-dealing transactions.

1905 06 27

Sir – is it not about time that the annual Bacchanalian orgy known as Midsummer Fair was abolished? On Saturday night men, women and even children intoxicated by drink were behaving like maniacs. There were 14 tents for the supply of intoxicating liquors whilst behaviour in the dancing tents is indescribable. In one booth I saw two tiny mites whose mothers had given them too much to drink, for they were quite intoxicated and outside another I saw five perambulators standing unattended – A.J.L.B.

1905 06 27

Sir – may I protest against the needless pandemonium Chesterton residents are forced to endure during the Midsummer Fair by the hideous orchestrations attached to shows and merry-go-rounds, grinding out harsh and discordant sounds which make day and night a time of torture. No sane people can find pleasure in the ear-splitting metallic sounds emanating from these machines. Such a noise, coupled with the hooting of horns and the screeching of steam whistles render rest an impossibility – Nerves

1905 06 27

Sir – every year our Midsummer Fair is visited by a number of itinerant merchants selling pots, pans, linoleum, furs, drapery and various oddments. They pay little rent and no rates and taxes and yet they take away hundreds of pounds which ought to be spent in local shops. In many cases people actually pay more for the goods at these mock auctions than they would in a proper shop – Tradesman

1906 05 05

Stourbridge Fair was once very important but now was of very small dimension. The council took a toll of 4d for each horse, 2d for each pony and 1d for a cow. They also got money from the roundabouts and shows, making £33. But they had the expense of opening the fair, which meant a couple of carriages. Most of the fair was held on the side of Garlic Row but now there was a scheme for bringing a road right through from the Newmarket Road. Mr Banyard had started to erect some house and wanted to stop fair people putting their vans upon his ground. 06 05 12c & d

1906 06 23

An alarm of fire was raised at one of the cinematograph shows at Midsummer Fair. A film and various odds and ends near the operating box became ignited and flames shot up above the front staging. Some alarm was shown by the audience who were assured there was not the slightest danger but all the exits were opened and those who wished were enabled to leave without difficulty. The flames were quickly extinguished and the entertainment proceeded as usual. 06 06 23a & b

1906 06 23

Midsummer Fair visited and described – 06 06 23a & b

1906 06 30

Midsummer Fair leaves Common dirty [1.21]

1906 09 26a

Stourbridge Fair has, with the exception of the horse fair, become the shrine of gaiety. Its centre is a lonely house whose gable windows are decorated with fairy lights. Inside the stairs are carved and wide like those of a prosperous mansion and lead to an extensive room with bare floor and white-washed walls. A harpist can be dimly seen through the haze of tobacco smoke and a concertina joins in the melody, dancers swirl around: girls with girls and youths with youths with no conventions of the ball-room. 06 09 26a b & c

1907 06 22

Midsummer fair proclaimed – 07 Jun 22 – a Saturday night visit – 07 06 24a

1907 06 22

This year's Midsummer Fair is the biggest for many years with large shows, roundabouts and switchbacks. A special feature is Charles Thurston's "Helter Skelter" and Canadian sport of Mat – tobogganning – should prove popular. Another attractive feature is Baker and Thurston's motor cars which race over a specially-prepared track at a speed of 50 miles an hour 07 06 22

1907 06 24

Time was when the visitor to Midsummer Fair had to risk a miniature shower bath in the form of 'squirts' wielded by girls and youths. These were officially banned and this year also the throwing of confetti has been put a stop to. While this no doubt curtails the enjoyment of the young and frivolous, it is a boon to more sedate visitors and the harmless 'ticklers' which the law allows did not appear to be in very great request 07 06 24a

1907 09 07

One hundred years ago all kinds of goods from furniture to cheese were sold at Stourbridge Fair. But it is now only a shadow of what it used to be. When the Mayor proclaimed it on 4th September the only sign of anything unusual was one solitary gipsy brush van. It continues until October 16th but only about the 26th does anything in the nature of a fair take place. The railway has probably had more than anything to do with the dying out of these ancient marts 07 09 07c

1908 06 26

Dealers spoke very pessimistically of trade at the Horse Fair on Midsummer Common. There are periodic shows of horses at Cambridge and St Ives and that is where most of the good local horses go. Added to the scarcity of horses in the country, the trade on the Common is decreasing year by year and in a few years this old-established sale will be no more CWN 08 06 26 p7

1908 09 18

Last year Cambridge magistrates granted eleven occasional licences for the period of Stourbridge Fair. But this year they have been reduced to just six, three for the horse fair and three for the pleasure fair. They are to the landlords of the Dog and Pheasant, Birdbolt and Burleigh Arms on Newmarket Road, The Ship in Princess Street, Empress on Thoday Street and City Arms, Sturton Street. CWN 08 09 18 p3

1910 02 11

Harry Cox of King Street was an old pugilist who learnt in a hard school where gloves were regarded as unnecessary. He started in a travelling fairground booth but when he visited Midsummer Fair decided to settle in Cambridge. He took part in many open-air fights without the sanction of the law which were witnessed by large numbers. Pupils from the University attended his rooms at the Green Lion in Short Street and later at the Royston Arms, Jesus Lane. "Professor Cox" also gave lessons at St John's and other colleges and several University champions passed through his hands including T. Milvain of Trinity Hall who was

heavyweight champion of All England in 1868-69 and is now Judge Advocate General. 10 02 11c

1910 06 24

There are again no drinking booths at Midsummer Fair after magistrates refused permission. Up to 1874 certain people had the right to sell intoxicating liquor without an occasional licence and before 1908 the lowest number of licences had been 15. A large number of people – sometimes 10,000 – came from a distance and wanted a glass of beer and a sandwich in the evening. It was impossible for the nearest pubs to cater for them. Then there were the proprietors of shows & stallholders. Messrs Thurston and Barker employed no less than 100 hands with the roundabouts and they should be able to get food on the fairground. 10 06 24 & a

1910 09 09

Stourbridge Fair was proclaimed by the Mayor. Remembering that it was for many years one of the biggest fairs in England, the present function is one of the sorriest of sights. The carriages conveying the robed officials was but a gloomy procession and little knots of woman and children stood along the route out of curiosity. Though there are generally a few stalls for the sale of dubious delicacies on the Common, there was no sign of enterprise of any kind. The fair does not open for another three weeks. 10 09 09b

1910 09 16

Licences for Oyster House during Stourbridge Fair – 10 09 16

1911 09 08

Stourbridge Fair proclaimed – 11 09 08

1912 06 21

For the first time in Cambridge a service under the auspice of the Showman's Guild was held at Midsummer Fair when about 650 people assembled in Mr Charles Thurston's tent. The Rev T. Horner, preacher, began life as a showman and after taking Holy Orders his heart was still with the showmen and he had given himself to the work. At the Midsummer Horse Fair trade was none too brisk. Mr Pink had a drove of 80 unbroken Welsh cobs and ponies, there were a few cart horses, half-a-dozen mares and a good number of nondescript cart and nag horses 12 06 21f

1912 07 12

Since Midsummer Fair there has been a very great increase in the number of cases of scarlet fever. The disease had been epidemic in Cambridge for a long time and owing to the mildness of the cases it is proving most difficult to cope with. Many are only discovered during the 'peeling' stage. Numbers of children in an infectious state attended the fair resulting in the sudden jump of reported cases 12 07 23e Interview with a victim – describes symptoms – 12 07 12l

1913 06 27

Midsummer Fair proclaimed

1913 09 05

Historic Stourbridge fair was the cause of many disputes between the University and the Town. Now there is nothing left to fight over. The Town Clerk, accompanied by the Mayor and ten members of the Corporation read the proclamation to an audience consisting mainly of urchins at the Leper Chapel. Standing on a carriage he commanded silence 'under pain of imprisonment', a penalty to which only a horse and a motor cycle laid themselves open. The procession then drove back to Garlic Row where, beside some old houses which must have

seen the Fair in its flourishing state, the same formality was gone through. A single caravan was the only sign of the forthcoming fair. 13 09 05 p8 CIP

1913 09 26

Stourbridge fair horse sales were up to the average but the amusements consisted of a dozen swing boats, two coconut shies, a shooting gallery and a few stalls laden with gaudy trifles. Doubtful-looking sweetmeats attracted the younger generation who predominated after the horse fair was over. Any 'grown-ups' came from curiosity rather than a desire for amusement. One burly policeman said he has seen more attractions at village flower shows than at this fair, which was once one of the largest in Europe. 13 09 26 p12 CIP

1913 10 03

P.C. Thirkettle told that court that while on Newmarket Road he received a complaint from Mrs Manning, a stall-keeper on the fair ground, that her stall had been entered and she had lost a toy fire engine, three rubber balls and a quantity of chocolate cream and butterscotch. A 20-year-old painter from Stanley Road had admitted to stealing the engine. He said he rolled up the canvas from the bottom. He'd produced one of the rubber balls but said he only took two butterscotches. He'd not been in trouble before. He was fined £5 13 10 03 p8 CIP

1914 06 26

Midsummer Fair p11

1914 09 11

Stourbridge Fair

1914 10 02

Stourbridge Fair & horse fair – few booths. Regular horse sales have diminished the importance of the horse fair and with no other attractions than gazing on stalls displaying doubtful-looking sweetmeats, trying to knock cocoanuts off a stand and taking a swing or a roundabout, very few are likely to go for pleasure 14 10 02

1915 09 03

Stourbridge fair proclaimed – no stalls or booths, audience just band of urchins who had chased the motor cars in hope of pennies

1916 10 11

Stourbridge Fair one of the has beens: some memories of its busy days 16 10 11b

1916 06 18

Midsummer Fair to be the largest for half a century – 19 06 18

1917 09

Mayor proclaims Stourbridge Fair, driven in taxi by lady [1.12]

1917

Stourbridge Fair: only horse fair remains [1.23]

1920 06 21

Poem on the arrival of the fair

1920 06 22

Midsummer fair proclamation

1920 09 04

Stourbridge Fair proclaimed – the only audience a crowd of youngsters

1922 06 22

Midsummer Fair was proclaimed this morning by the Mayor (Councillor G.P. Hawkins) when crowds of people attended to witness the time-honoured ceremony. The old cry of "Biggest fair I've seen for years" suggests that the Fair is still growing. Thurston's roundabout are again present and number about six in all. They include their famous golden dragons, gondolas and motor scenic railways. Three circuses and numerous "laugh and grow fat" shows make up a good square mile of pleasure ground. There are the usual crockery and sweet stalls, rock kings, cheap jacks, fortune tellers and the like in unusual profusion. An objectionable feature this year is a diabolical engine that emits a banshee-like wail at frequent intervals. It ought to be smothered.

1923 06 22

Midsummer fair seems to get bigger than ever. From all appearances the amusement caterers and smallholders are going to do good business. Hoop-las are not so plentiful, but there are many new ingenious contrivances to extract the pence from those who are out for an evening's merriment. The sideshows are certainly more numerous, but one still misses the large pavilions in which the "animated pictures" were shown. The cinemas have evidently killed these stone dead. A visit to the fair is well worth while, even if one does not feel equal to a trip on a roundabout, a swing round on a chairplane, or some other more or less thrilling diversion.

1923 06 22

Sir- I was interested to read your article about donkeys at Midsummer Fair. The rides are no doubt appreciated by the kiddies, but it is surely going too far when "kiddies" of 18 and 25 are seen mounting on the backs of our four-footed friends. The ponies are started off on a run of 100 yards, and tear backwards and forwards, sweating and blowing, without a minute's rest, beaten with sticks and sundry kicks, yells and curses. The police should look into the matter for there is nothing more painful to watch than the ill-treatment of a dumb animal and if a young man of 18 cares to make an ass of himself to ride on something intended for a child, it will be easy to discover the bigger donkey of the two. - A Lover of Animals

1923 09 25

Stourbridge fair, Cambridge, has been for the last few years dwindling in size and seemed likely to become nothing more than a custom. This year it has taken a new lease of life through the enterprise of Messrs Thurston and Sons. The amusements are of the usual varied type, the most noticeable absentee being the once popular Hoop-la. One may however indulge in the excitement of "Housey, Housey". Thurston's scenic railway, Manning's flying horses and the swing boats provide the thrill of the rush through space. Need we add that the whelk stall occupies the place of honour

1925 12

Steps taken to abolish Stourbridge Fair [1.5]

1925 06 22

Yet another precedent was created by the Mayor (Councillor Mrs Hartree) when under Midsummer Fair was officially opened in the presence of a good crowd. This is the first time in its long history that the Fair has been opened by a lady. There followed a liberal scattering of shining coppers and children, their elders as well as Fair hands pushed and scrambled in the dust to secure the coveted coins. The roundabout horses were soon laden with merrymakers while housewives, for a more serious purpose, haunted the innumerable crockery stalls in search of bargains in china.

1927 06 27

Cambridge station had a very busy weekend. Over 4,000 travelled on Saturday to visit the Midsummer Fair. Extra carriages were attached to all incoming and outgoing trains and late special trains were run to Haverhill, Newmarket, St Ives and Great Chesterford

1928 06

Large fair Midsummer Common 4,000 attend by train [1.14]

1928 06 27

Mary White, alias Zeta was charged with using palmistry and crystal gazing to deceive at Midsummer Fair. Two policewomen gave evidence of visiting her tent and paying 3s to have their hands examined. But she had applied to the Borough Surveyor for the ground, six foot by four feet for a palmistry tent and had enclosed 5s for premium. She had a letter giving her permission to stand as palmist. Why was the ground let for business which was said to be illegal? The Bench decided to convict, but with no penalty.

1930 06 26

A fortune-teller arrested at Cambridge Midsummer Fair appeared in court for palmistry. Two policewomen told how they had visited the 'Royal Gypsy Reader'. They were told that the face was character and the charge 1s.6d., the hands palmistry and the cost 2s.6d. One was assured that her worst financial worries were over and she would not go to the grave single; "You have not met the man yet, but he will come". Amelia Hazelhurst admitted the charge and was fined £1.

1931 05 08

Midsummer Fair is to be held this year on Stourbridge Common; money had been spent reseeding Midsummer Common and would be wasted if heavy traction engines and other fair equipment were allowed on it. The fair was getting bigger and bigger with complaints about the noise and it is extremely unlikely it will ever return there. But showmen objected; the music could be reduced but most of the noise came from the 'Walls of Death' which ought to be banned. 31 05 08 g-I

1931 05 29

Last fair on Midsummer Common? – photo – 31 05 29b

1931 06 19

Midsummer Fair counterblast – Showman's Guild arranges rival show at Arnold's Meadow near Barnwell junction – 31 06 19c & d & e

1931 07 03

The last vans, trains of tractors and heavy wagons have made their way from the Showman's Guild fair ground, Newmarket Road, bearing the dismantled remains of the devices which have thrilled thousands during the week. The Guild have eliminated the undesirables and shown Cambridge that travelling folk are as sober and industrious as the rest. Midsummer Common was more central but the only complaints were about the bus fares to the ground. 31 07 03a

1931 10 02

It is easier to kill a man than to kill a custom so every year on Sept 25th the Mayor, Town Clerk, Bailiffs and Town Crier form a solemn procession which proceeds to Stourbridge Common to open the Fair. But this year not even schoolchildren were there to greet them and a News reporter was the sole representative of the public until a solitary figure strolled up. There were no roundabouts, swings or stalls, not even the traction engine that last year was the final relic of a dying fair, puffed and snorted in welcome. 31 10 02d

1932 06 22

Midsummer Fair returns to original site after a year on Stourbridge Common, opening – 32 06 22b, 32 06 29

1932 06 24

There were three horses for sale on Midsummer Common – which is three more than last year. A group of bored-looking men watched the animals being put through their paces. An elderly man dressed in country clothes patted one of them and looked critically at its teeth. A young man in oil-stained overalls walked over, a pail in each hand. “What’s going on”, he asked. “The Horse Fair” I replied. “Never heard of it”. So pass out ancient institutions. 32 06 24

1933 01 17

The owner of Reliance Motors, Cottenham, sued Eastern Counties Omnibus Company for damages. They alleged he’d run two hackney carriage licensed cars between Cottenham and Midsummer Fair, picking up and putting down passengers en route. To use private cars or taxis as motor coaches was misconduct of a very bad kind. He had four motor buses and two taxicabs which he’d used that day for private hire, charging four shillings return. He produced his order book – written on blotting paper – as proof. 33 01 17 & 17a

1933 09 25

Stourbridge fair proclaimed – 33 09 25

1934 04 07

Stourbridge Fair abolition recommended

1934 07 21

Stourbridge Fair abolished by order of Secretary of State, Home Department, confirming council resolution; in 1897 it had lasted three days and apart from ‘ossferde’ dealt with nothing but toys, confectionary and amusements. 20 years later only horse fair remained [1.7]

1934 06 29

Mayor proclaims Wood Fair open in Newmarket Road before going onto Midsummer Fair

1936 05 05

Undergraduates, tired of their boring existence at the University, found a new way of letting off their spirits. A party ‘invaded’ the fair on Midsummer Common and obtained permission from the proprietor of the Wall of Death to give a display. Two mounted on motor cycles and the others on bicycles then gave a short show with plenty of impromptu thrills and spills. Fortunately no proctors appeared on the scene. 36 05 05a

1936 06 23

Midsummer Fair showmen were in a state of indignation after police banned games and competitions for which prizes are offered, practically paralysing the fair. “They stopped everything, including darts and hoop-la, but these are games of skill or where the element of gambling is of a trivia nature” showmen complained. The games were for amusement, not to encourage gambling and the Home Secretary had said no objections would be raised to people playing for prizes or money not exceeding one shilling in value 36 06 23a

1938 08 29

Did you know that coconut shies had their origin at the Cambridge Fair? A Showman’s Guild official says: “These old fairground games are a traditional part of England. They have been in existence for centuries. At the old Cambridge fair they used to shy at live cockerels; then an Act was passed forbidding it because of the cruelty. So the showmen substituted lead dummies and these were the origin of the coconut shies” 36 08 29a

1936 11 04

The Cambridge and County Folk Museum at the old 'White Horse Inn' was opened in the presence of a large company. It would become a clearing house of information on local matters in a town where there is more information about Papua than Pampisford. The Corporation had handed over its old measures, the steelyard used at Stourbridge Fair and the High Constable's stave while the Public Library had loaned portraits and caricatures to give a human touch to the museum. Miss Catherine Parsons has accepted the position of honorary curator with Reginald Lambeth as custodian. 36 11 04b & c

1940 06 21

Fair Cancelled. It was announced at the start of Thursday's meeting of the Cambridge Town Council that Midsummer Fair will not be held. Making the announcement, the Mayor (Coun. W.J. Wing) stated that up to a day or two ago it had been decided that the fair should be held, so that the people might make a little money. "But, considering what has happened recently," he added, "it has been felt that it would be unwise to hold this fair". That decision, which has the support of the Regional Commissioner, is also supported by an address from residents in the vicinity of the Common. It has been decided, therefore, that we shall not hold the fair 40 06 21

1942 01 30

Midsummer Fair not to be held – 42 01 30a

1942 08 28

Midsummer Fair – old photos – 42 08 28

1943 05 02

Midsummer Fair held despite danger; first wartime fair 43 05 29

1944 06 26

Police carry out identity card check at Midsummer Fair, four arrested – 44 06 26

1946 06 22

Biggest-ever Midsummer Fair opened, includes Wall of Death, Big Wheel, new Dodgem and the Moonrocket – 46 06 22

1950 06 21

From tomorrow until Monday, Midsummer Common will once again be the money-spinning mecca of Cambridge's youth, the young in years and spirit. A hundred engines will cough and splutter to power the transformation. 10,000 coloured lights will be waiting to give artificial brilliance to the scene. Canned music will blare from the hurdy-gurdies, the fair will be on.

1951 11 26

Fines totalling £20 were imposed upon a woman stallholder summoned for overcharging for nylons. She sold a pair of fully fashioned nylon hose stamped with the words "15 dernier" at 17s.11d, a price exceeding the maximum retail price, at Midsummer Fair, Cambridge. A housewife said she paid 10s 11d for a pair of nylons and had been told they were not perfect – one being longer than the other. When she got home she found they were both laddered. She exchanged them for another pair, which cost an additional 7s and these also had ladders in them. The nylon quality was good but she did not like paying 17s.11d for them and she made a complaint to the Price Regulation Committee

1953 06 23

A miniature town of tents, side-shows and enormous gaily-coloured structures housing a thousand thrills for the venturesome has made its annual appearance on Midsummer

Common. But this year the Fair seems to be bigger and brighter than ever; it offers a more animated scene than in the past and there is an air of friendly gaiety, shared by showmen and their patrons which suggests the influence of Coronation year. The Town Clerk read the proclamation then all members of the Mayoral party threw handfuls of half-pennies among the crowd. The many children present were in their element and scrambling amongst the feet of the adults made a fair harvest of this welcome crop of shining coins. The Fair is the biggest in the Eastern Counties and can boast no fewer than 24 roundabouts. The 'Dodgems' are a special feature, reputedly amongst the best of any fair in England.

1955 06 23

Hundreds of excited youngsters crowded round one of the large 'jollity farm' roundabouts for the traditional proclamation of Cambridge Midsummer Fair after which out came the blue paper bags full of brand new halfpennies and up went the youngsters' hand as the coins were tossed into the crowd. Then it was free rides for everybody. All the old favourites are back again – the 'Moon Rocket', 'Octopus' and 'Gallopings Horses'. "'Ere only a tanner a bash, keep all yer knock down" yelled the man at the coconut shy while the carpet and lino sellers competed to see who could shout the loudest

1956 06 23

Crowds swarmed around the 'Jollity Farm' for the traditional opening of Midsummer Fair by the Mayor. Excitement rose as Mr S. Thurston announced that all rides on the 'Dodgems' would be free. The music started and 'Davy Crocket' blended happily with 'Sugar Bush' from the other side of the fairground. Space rockets and high-powered machines have been introduced but they will never outdo the old favourites such as the ghost house, the mat and the horses. 56 06 23a

1957 01 10

The Oyster House in Garlic Row was named after hundreds of oyster shells found in the garden. It dates from 1707 and was originally known as the Tiled Booth in which the Mayor and Vice Chancellor would feast at the traditional opening of Stourbridge Fair. The house was bought for a small amount by John Lee, a coprolite digger, whose initials can be seen on a plaque on the building. Now it is scheduled for demolition. 57 01 10

The Cambridgeshire Collection has newspaper cuttings files from this date

1960 07 01

It is an unsettling life with a fair and you have to be born and bred within the sound of the roundabout to be able to dwell peacefully with a community which is virtually a small world on its own. Many have grown up through a sequence of homes on wheels. They have seen the pack horse and tents, the two wheeled tilted cart with canvas covering, the four-wheeled wagon, the 'whoopie' which introduced the modern luxurious caravans complete with running water, sink units, kitchen stoves and television. If owners do not have a bath sunk into they floor they go to public baths or even knock on the door of a private house and request one for a small fee. 60 07 01

1966 04 13

City of Cambridge order 1966 enacts that Midsummer Fair starts on 3rd Wed June (or 4th if 3rd 15,16 or 17th) & continues for 4 days

1966 05 20

Stanley Thurston fairground memories – 66 05 20a

1966 09 06

Harry Day played penny whistle; at Stourbridge Fair joined 'Herb' Reynolds and Charlie Hunter with their concertinas and harp on the upper floor of the Oyster House playing reels, waltzes etc – 66 09 06

1969 09 24

Midsummer Fair china seller feature – 69 09 24a

1977 07 02

Midsummer fair 'best for years'

1981 05 13

Midsummer Fair may be called off if the Showmen's Guild and Cambridge City Council can't reach agreement over proposed rent increases or proposals for more attractions. It has been described as the second largest fair in Britain but this includes many market traders who take stalls; in terms of fairground rides there are many larger. "The fair is quite honestly not that good – it's large, but not well-attended" one showman said. 81 05 13

1981 06 03

Cambridge Midsummer Fair may be reduced to a small handful of trade stalls because of a squabble between councillors and showmen. The showmen's guild has decided to boycott the fair because its members are refusing to pay a 25 per-cent rent increase. It would mean large machines like the 'jollity farm' would be charged £125 for the four-day period. Sideshows would have to pay about £4 more a day. But commercial traders still want to take space on the common and hope there will be 'some sort of fair'. 81 06 03a

1981 06 06

Move to save Midsummer Fair – 81 06 06

1981 06 10

Midsummer fair set to go ahead – 81 06 10

1981 07 08

Master showman, Stanley Thurston, who never missed a Midsummer Fair in his life, has died aged 83. He ran his travelling fair for many years before turning it over to his twin sons and daughter eight years ago. He was born in a caravan and later had one of the best vans ever built – solid mahogany throughout. He believed that British fairs were the best in the world and just as popular now as they ever were 81 07 08a

1981 07 15

Funeral of Stanley Thurston, fair proprietor. 81 07 15b

1983 03 03

Attempts to deter 'fair followers'; memories of history of fair by Stan White 83 03 03 [6]

1985 06 26

Cambridge Midsummer Fair passed off without incident. Councillors are pleased with their £20,000 security operation which involved blocking the entrances to all council-owned land in the city and hiring strong security patrols to roam the streets and protect commons against unwanted caravan dwelling itinerants. For years previously they had cut a swathe of trouble and destruction during their visit. But it is likely to take at least a month, given good weather, to get the churned-up parts of Midsummer Common back to its former lush state following the week-long deluge that soaked the grass 85 06 26

1987 10 14

Jack Reynolds, rock maker and confectioner, is to retire after 40 years in the rock business. His father, James, was known as 'The Rock King' whose stall at the fairs on Midsummer Common was a familiar sight. Jack opened a shop on Newmarket Road about 1947 and has lived in the area all his life. The road has changed a lot; when he came there were houses in Occupation Road and several businesses have disappeared. He no longer makes his own rock but his son and grandson are carrying on the family name. 87 10 14a

1988 06 27

Fortune tellers at Midsummer Fair – feature – 88 06 27a

1989 04 03

May have May Day fair if Midsummer Common not waterlogged; Easter fair banned - "traditional for 50 years" øCEN 3.4.89

1989 04 27

1st May Day fair - no Easter fair for 2nd year due weather - itself scuppered

1990 01 25

Cambridge's Easter fair has been banned for the third year running. The Showmen's Guild has been told they cannot set up their rides on Midsummer Common because the grass needs time to recover from the winter. But the fair has been held for 50 years or so and damage was minimal. Its loss causes hardship to showmen and deprives citizens of the opportunity to enjoy the sights and sounds. Last year what should have been the city's first May Day fair was cancelled because the common was waterlogged. 90 01 25b